A STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF NCR

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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DECLARATION BY THE SCHOLAR

I hereby declare that the short synopsis entitled **A STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF NCR** being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Management and Commerce under the School of Management and Commerce of Manav Rachna University, Faridabad during the academic year 2024-2025.

It is the work that is expected to be carried out under the supervision of Dr. Sunil Kadyan and co-supervision of Dr. Subodh Saluja . Further, it is declared that the short synopsis is within the plagiarism limit and copy of the same is attached as per the University norms.

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This is to certify that, the short synopsis entitled **A STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES OF NCR** is an original piece of work done by research scholar Ms. Mona Chaudhary, under the supervision of Dr. Sunil Kadyan and co-Supervision of Dr. Subodh Saluja for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Management and Commerce under the School of Management and Commerce of Manav Rachna University, Faridabad during the academic year 2024-25.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the adoption of online degree programs in higher education institutes within the National Capital Region (NCR) of India. It seeks to identify the key factors influencing learners' willingness to enrol in online programs and the challenges students and teachers face. Additionally, the study examines the criteria employers consider when evaluating the acceptance of online degrees. By employing a quantitative methodology using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the research will analyse the relationships between various factors, including ease of use, technological access, and perceived program value for learners. It will also explore technical and engagement challenges educators encounter and employers' perceptions of institutional reputation and program quality. The findings are expected to offer significant insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and employers. These insights will help improve the design and delivery of online programs, address learner and teacher adoption challenges and enhance the acceptance and credibility of online degrees in the professional sector. Ultimately, this research will contribute to the academic discourse on online education and provide evidence-based recommendations for optimising online degree programs to meet the growing demand in higher education.

Keywords: Online degree programs, higher education, learner adoption, teacher challenges, employer acceptance, educational technology

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A STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

1. Introduction

Online degree programs have become a pivotal innovation as higher education continues to evolve, offering increased flexibility and accessibility to learners worldwide. This study focuses on adopting online degree programs in higher education institutes in India, aiming to uncover the factors driving learner enrolment, the obstacles faced by both students and educators and the considerations employers weigh when assessing online qualifications. By employing a quantitative methodology with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the research will systematically analyse these dimensions to identify key determinants influencing learner engagement and success. Additionally, it will explore the technical, motivational, and logistical challenges encountered in the online degree program and examine how institutional reputation, program quality, and alignment with industry demands affect employer perceptions of online degrees. The study's findings will not only shed light on the current landscape of online education but also offer strategic recommendations for enhancing program effectiveness, addressing stakeholder concerns, and fostering broader acceptance of online degrees in the academic and professional arenas.

2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shape the future of online education in India. By exploring the key factors influencing the adoption of online degree programs among learners, the challenges faced by both learners and teachers, and employers' acceptance of online degrees, this research will provide valuable insights for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators. The findings will help design more effective online programs, improve student and teacher experiences, and enhance the credibility and market acceptance of online degrees. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the broader academic discourse on online education and inform the development of policies and strategies to support the growing demand for online learning in higher education.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Factors Affecting the Willingness of Learners to Join an Online Degree Program

The adoption of online degree programs is becoming a significant focus in higher education, particularly for the flexibility and accessibility they offer (Means et al., 2014). Several factors influence a learner's decision to enrol in an online program, including ease of use, cost, technology access, work-life balance, prior experience, and perceived value.

3.1.1 Ease of Use and Accessibility: According to Davis (1989), ease of use is an important factor affecting technology acceptance. In online education, a platform that is user-friendly and easily accessible increases the likelihood of learners engaging with the program (Selim, 2007). The flexibility of online programs, which allows learners to access content at their convenience, further enhances their willingness to participate (Al-Fraihat et al., 2020).

3.1.2 Cost and Financial Considerations: The financial aspect is decisive in education decisions. Research shows that affordability and perceived value for money are significant motivators for students considering online degrees (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Lower tuition costs compared to traditional programs and eliminating relocation and commuting expenses are particularly appealing (Bowen, 2013).

3.1.3 Technology and Internet Access Skills: The digital divide remains a challenge, but as internet penetration increases, so does the feasibility of online learning (van Dijk, 2005). Students with higher technological proficiency and reliable internet access are more inclined to enrol in online degree programs (Kaufman et al., 2019). This ease of access and confidence in using digital tools contribute to the growing popularity of online education.

3.1.4 Work-Life Balance: Online programs are generally flexible and allow learners to balance their academics and other responsibilities, which is a significant factor in their decision to pursue an online degree (Gosper et al., 2010). The students can learn at their own pace, which benefits working professionals and those with family obligations (Stone & O'Shea, 2019).

3.1.5 Previous Experience with Online Learning: Prior exposure to online learning platforms can positively influence a learner's decision to pursue an online degree. Familiarity with online tools, learning management systems, and virtual communication platforms reduces

the perceived risk and enhances confidence in successfully completing an online program (Hung et al., 2010).

3.1.6 Perceived Value and Institutional Reputation: The reputation of the institution offering the online degree plays a crucial role in the decision-making process (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009). Learners are more likely to enrol in programs from institutions that are well-regarded and have a strong track record of delivering quality education. Additionally, the perceived value of the degree in terms of career advancement opportunities is a significant motivator (Sussman & Yarasavage, 2011).

3.2 Impact of Challenges Faced by Learners in Adopting Online Education

The transition to online education has presented various challenges for learners, impacting their ability to effectively adopt and succeed in this learning format.

3.2.1 Technical Issues: Technical difficulties, including poor internet connectivity, inadequate hardware, and software glitches, are significant barriers to online education (Alamri et al., 2020). These challenges can cause frustration and hinder learning, leading to a negative perception of online education (Nash, 2015).

3.2.2 Lack of Self-Motivation and Discipline: Online education requires high self-discipline and motivation, as students are often required to manage their own learning schedules (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020). The absence of a structured classroom environment can lead to procrastination and decreased academic performance (Broadbent & Poon, 2015).

3.2.3 Limited Interaction and Engagement: The non-availability of face-to-face interaction can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement among learners (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). This limitation negatively affects the learning experience and can result in higher dropout rates (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005).

3.2.4 Limited Access to Resources: Access to resources, including textbooks, library materials, and technical assistance during the program, is often limited in online education (Parkes et al., 2015). This lack of resources can create significant barriers to learning and reduce the effectiveness of an online degree program.

3.2.5 Insufficient Time and Lack of Support for Studies: Many online learners struggle in creating a balance between their studies and other responsibilities, making it challenging to

allocate sufficient time for their studies (Lee & Choi, 2013). Additionally, the lack of support from employers or family members can exacerbate these challenges (Kemp, 2002).

3.2.6 Lack of Technical Proficiency: A lack of technical skills can hinder learners' ability to navigate online learning platforms effectively (Yu & Richardson, 2015). This deficiency can lead to frustration and decreased satisfaction with the online learning experience.

3.3 Impact of Challenges Faced by Teachers in Adopting Online Education

Teachers also face significant challenges in adapting to online education, which can impact their effectiveness and the overall quality of education delivered.

3.3.1 Student Engagement Challenges: Engaging students in an online environment is more challenging than in a traditional learning environment having classrooms (Bolliger & Martin, 2018). Teachers must find new ways to maintain students' attention and foster participation, which can be difficult without face-to-face interaction.

3.3.2 Technical Challenges: Teachers often face technical difficulties, such as learning to use new software, managing online classrooms, and troubleshooting issues (Cutri et al., 2020). These challenges can lead to frustration and reduce the effectiveness of online teaching.

3.3.3 Workload and Time Management Difficulties: The transition to online teaching often requires significant additional work, including creating digital content, managing online discussions, and providing timely feedback (Rapanta et al., 2020). This increased workload can be overwhelming and lead to burnout.

3.3.4 Challenges in Course Design and Delivery: Designing and delivering online courses that are both engaging and effective requires new skills and approaches (Anderson, 2008). Teachers may struggle to adapt traditional teaching methods to the online format, which can impact the quality of education.

3.3.5 Challenges in Assessment and Evaluation: Assessing students' progress in an online environment presents unique challenges, such as ensuring academic integrity and providing meaningful feedback (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Teachers must develop new strategies to evaluate students effectively in an online setting.

3.3.6 Difficulties in Ensuring Effective Learning Outcomes: Ensuring that students achieve the desired intended outcomes in an online environment can be challenging due to the lack of

direct interaction and the reliance on self-directed learning (Means et al., 2009). Teachers must find ways to support students in achieving these outcomes despite the limitations of online education.

3.4 Factors Affecting the Acceptance of Online Degrees by Employers

Employers' acceptance of online degrees is crucial for the success of online education programs. Several factors influence employers' perceptions and acceptance of online qualifications.

3.4.1 Institutional Reputation: The reputation of the institution offering the online degree plays a significant role in employers' acceptance of the qualification (Carnevale et al., 2010). Employers are more likely to value degrees from well-established and reputable institutions.

3.4.2 Perceived Quality of the Online Program: Employers' perceptions of the quality of the online program, including the rigour of the curriculum and the qualifications of the instructors, significantly impact their acceptance of online degrees (Adams & DeFleur, 2006). High-quality programs that demonstrate strong outcomes are more likely to be accepted by employers.

3.4.3 Industry Relevance of the Online Program: The extent to which the online degree program aligns with industry needs and demands is a critical factor in employers' acceptance (Gaskell & Mills, 2014). Programs that are designed in collaboration with industry professionals and include relevant skills training are more likely to be valued by employers.

3.4.4 Skills and Competencies Gained: Employers' perceptions of the skills and competencies gained from an online degree significantly impact their acceptance (Chung et al., 2015). Degrees that emphasise practical skills

3.5 Research Gaps

3.5.1 Research Gap 1:

While numerous studies have explored the factors influencing learners' enrolment in traditional education programs, limited research focuses on understanding the specific factors that motivate or deter learners from enrolling in online degree programs, especially in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. Moreover, the impact of emerging technologies and changing learner preferences on enrolment decisions has not been sufficiently addressed.

3.5.2 Research Gap 2:

Although some research has identified general challenges in online education, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically categorise and assess the specific challenges faced by different demographic groups of learners.

3.5.3 Research Gap 3:

The challenges faced by teachers in adopting online education have been discussed in the literature, but there is a significant gap in understanding how these vary across disciplines, levels of teaching experience, and geographic regions. Furthermore, the existing research often overlooks the potential strategies and institutional support mechanisms that could mitigate these challenges, thereby enhancing teachers' adoption of online education.

3.5.4 Research Gap 4:

While the factors influencing employers' acceptance of traditional degrees are well-documented, there is insufficient research on how employers perceive and evaluate online degrees. Specifically, there is a gap in understanding how factors like the reputation of the institution, perceived quality of the programs, and alignment with industry needs influence employers' decision-making processes. Additionally, the role of industry-specific accreditation and professional certifications within online degrees remains underexplored.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the key factors that influence learners' willingness to enrol in online degree programs?
2. What are the main challenges learners face when adopting online education?
3. What are the main challenges teachers face when adopting online education?
4. What factors do employers consider when evaluating the acceptance of online degrees?

5. Objectives:

Objective 1: "To identify the factors affecting the willingness of learners to join an online degree program"

Objective 2: "To study the impact of challenges faced by learners in adopting online education."

Objective 3: "To study the impact of challenges faced by teachers in adopting online education."

Objective 4: "To analyse the factors affecting the acceptance of online degrees by employers."

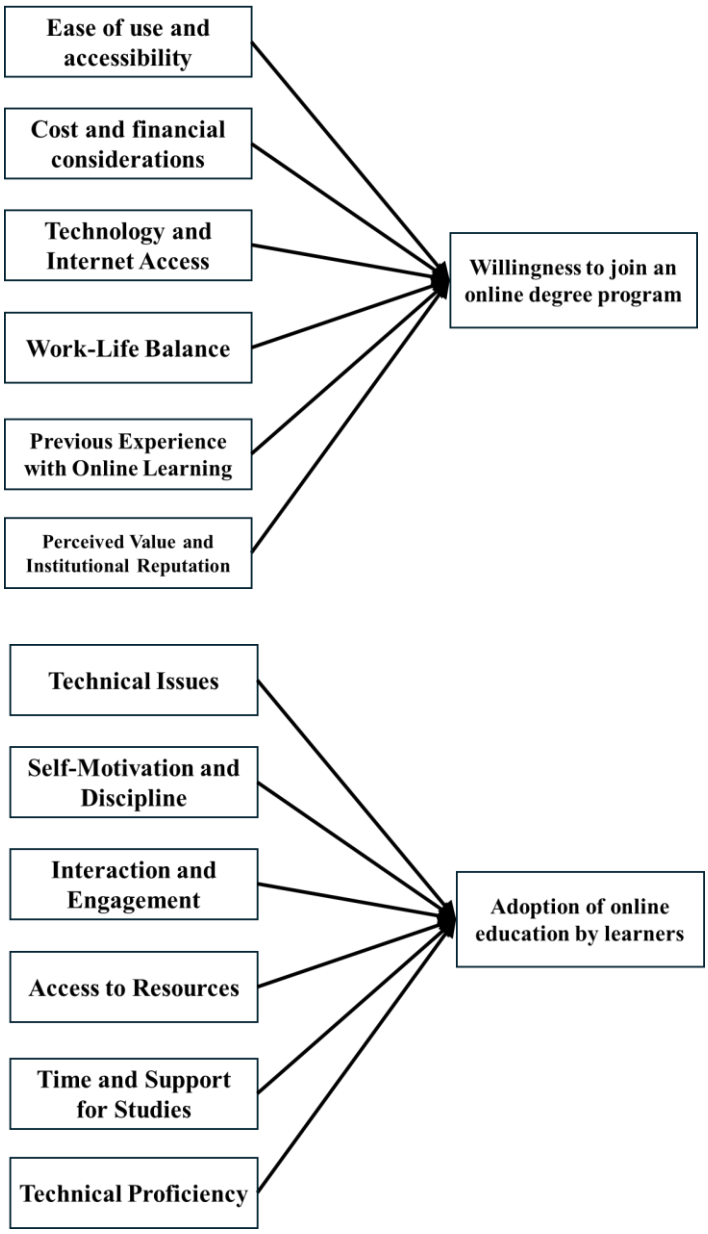
6. Hypotheses:

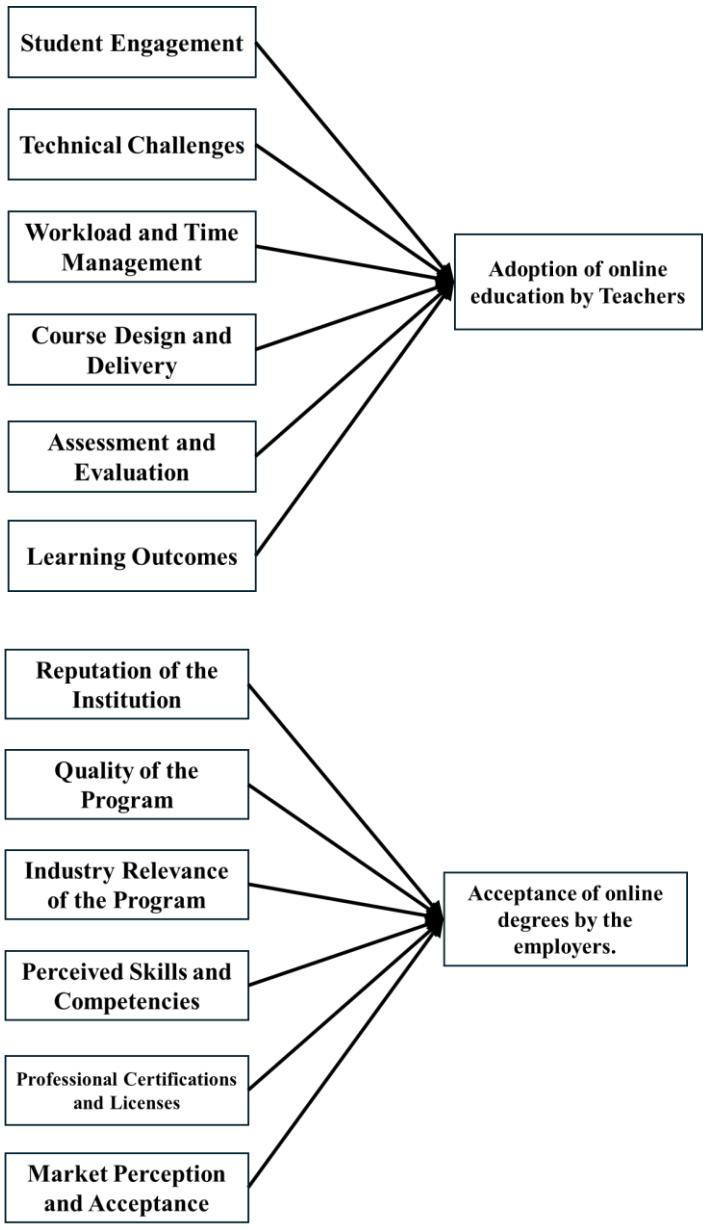
Objective 1: To identify the factors affecting the willingness of learners to join an online degree program	**H1:** "A significant positive relationship exists between the ease of use and accessibility of an online degree program and the willingness of learners to join the program." **H2:** "A significant positive relationship exists between the cost and financial considerations of an online degree program and the willingness of learners to join the program." **H3:** "A significant positive relationship exists between the learners' technology and internet access skills and their willingness to join an online degree program." **H4:** "A significant positive relationship exists between the work-life balance of learners and their willingness to join an online degree program."

	H5: "A significant positive relationship exists between learners' previous experience with online learning and their willingness to join an online degree program." **H6:** "A significant positive relationship exists between the perceived value and institutional reputation of an online degree program and the willingness of learners to join the program."
Objective 2: To study the impact of challenges faced by learners in adopting online education.	**H7:** "Technical issues negatively impact the learners' ability to adopt online education effectively." **H8:** "A lack of self-motivation and discipline among learners negatively impacts the adoption of online education effectively." **H9:** "Limited interaction and engagement in online education negatively impact the learners' experiences and their adoption of online education effectively." **H10:** "Limited access to resources, including the internet and technical support, negatively impacts the learners' ability to adopt online education effectively." **H11:** "Insufficient time and lack of support for studies negatively impact the learners' ability to adopt online education effectively." **H12:** "A lack of technical proficiency negatively impacts the learners' ability to adopt online education effectively."
Objective 3: To study the impact of challenges faced by teachers in adopting online education.	**H13:** "Student engagement challenges negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively." **H14:** "Technical challenges negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively." **H15:** "Difficulties in workload and time management negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively."

	H16: “Challenges in course design and delivery negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively.” **H17:** “Challenges in assessment and evaluation negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively.” **H18:** “Difficulties in ensuring effective learning outcomes negatively impact the teachers' ability to adopt online education effectively.”
Objective 4: To analyse the factors affecting the acceptance of online degrees by employers.	**H19:** “The reputation of the institution positively impacts the employers' acceptance of online degrees.” **H20:** “The perceived quality of the online program positively impacts the employers' acceptance of online degrees.” **H21:** “Industry Relevance of the online degree program positively impacts the employers' acceptance of online degrees.” **H22:** “Employers' perceptions of the skills and competencies gained from the online degree positively impact their acceptance of online degrees.” **H23:** “The inclusion of relevant professional certifications and licenses within the online program positively impacts the employers' acceptance of online degrees.” **H24:** “The broader market perception and acceptance of online degrees positively impact the employers' acceptance of online degrees.”

7. Conceptual Models:


Ease of use and accessibility
Cost and financial considerations
Technology and Internet Access
Work-Life Balance
Previous Experience with Online Learning
Perceived Value and Institutional Reputation
Willingness to join an online degree program
Technical Issues
Self-Motivation and Discipline
Interaction and Engagement
Access to Resources
Time and Support for Studies
Technical Proficiency
Adoption of online education by learners


Student Engagement
Technical Challenges
Workload and Time Management
Course Design and Delivery
Assessment and Evaluation
Learning Outcomes
Adoption of online education by Teachers
Reputation of the Institution
Quality of the Program
Industry Relevance of the Program
Perceived Skills and Competencies
Professional Certifications and Licenses
Market Perception and Acceptance
Acceptance of online degrees by the employers.

8. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical framework for this study integrates multiple theories and models that explain the factors affecting the acceptance of online degree programs, the challenges faced by learners and teachers in online education, and the factors affecting the acceptance of online degrees by employers. The framework combines elements of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory, and Institutional Theory.

8.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The TAM, proposed by Davis (1989), is a foundational model for understanding technology adoption in various contexts, including online education. TAM posits that two primary factors—Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU)—influence an individual's willingness to use technology, which subsequently affects actual usage behavior. TAM is relevant for examining how the ease of use, accessibility, and perceived usefulness of online degree programs affect learners' willingness to enroll.

- **PEOU**: This dimension is linked to Hypothesis 1 (H1), which suggests that ease of use and accessibility positively influence learners' willingness to join online degree programs. Online platforms that are user-friendly and accessible attract learners, particularly those who may be less tech-savvy.
- **PU**: The perceived usefulness of an online degree, which includes its value in terms of career advancement and skill acquisition, is crucial. This aligns with Hypothesis 6 (H6), where perceived value and institutional reputation are expected to positively influence enrollment decisions.

8.2 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The UTAUT model, developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), expands on TAM by incorporating additional factors such as Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, and Behavioral Intention. UTAUT is particularly useful in understanding how external factors and contextual variables impact technology adoption.

- **Social Influence**: This factor relates to the influence of peers, family, and societal norms on learners' decisions to enroll in online degree programs. It is indirectly reflected in the study's exploration of work-life balance (H4) and previous experience with online learning (H5), which may be influenced by social interactions and support networks.
- **Facilitating Conditions**: This dimension is reflected in the hypotheses concerning technical issues (H7) and access to resources (H10), which impact the adoption of online education. Adequate technical support and resource availability are critical for successful online learning experiences.

8.3 Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory

Rogers' DOI theory (2003) explains how new ideas are adopted in a social system over time. The theory identifies five key attributes that influence adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability.

- **Relative Advantage and Compatibility**: These attributes are related to the perceived benefits of online degrees (H2 and H6) and how well they fit with learners' existing needs and circumstances, such as work-life balance (H4) and previous experience (H5).
- **Complexity**: This aligns with the technical challenges (H7, H12) and the need for technological proficiency among learners and teachers. Programs that reduce complexity and enhance ease of use are more likely to be adopted.

8.4 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) provides insights into how organizational structures, norms, and legitimacy influence decision-making processes. This theory is particularly relevant when examining the acceptance of online degrees by employers.

- **Institutional Legitimacy**: Employers' acceptance of online degrees is influenced by the reputation and perceived quality of the issuing institution (H19 and H20). Institutions with strong reputations and alignment with industry standards are more likely to have their degrees recognized and valued by employers.
- **Market Perception**: The broader market perception and acceptance of online degrees (H24) play a crucial role in shaping employer attitudes. As online education becomes more mainstream, the legitimacy of online degrees is likely to increase, leading to greater acceptance.

8.5 Integration of Theories

The integration of TAM, UTAUT, DOI, and Institutional Theory provides a comprehensive framework to study the adoption of online degree programs from multiple perspectives—learners, educators, and employers. By considering the individual, social, and organizational factors that influence the adoption of online education, this theoretical framework enables a holistic analysis of the challenges and opportunities associated with online degree programs in India.

This framework will guide the analysis of the data collected in this study, helping to identify key factors that influence the adoption of online degree programs, the challenges faced by learners and educators, and the acceptance of online degrees by employers.

9. Research Methodology

9.1 Research Design

The research adopts a **descriptive design.** This approach is suitable for providing a detailed description of the relationships between these variables and explaining the underlying mechanisms. The study will utilize a quantitative methodology, employing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework to test the proposed hypotheses and analyze the structural relationships among the latent variables.

9.2 Data Collection Methods

Surveys will be the primary method of data collection. Three structured questionnaires, i.e. for learners, Teachers and Employers, will be developed, consisting of multiple observed indicators for each latent variable. The survey will be distributed online, leveraging digital platforms to reach a wide range of respondents.

9.3 Sampling

A **Purposive sampling** technique will be employed to ensure representation across different demographic segments. The sample will ensure the representation of demographics including age, income, and education levels to capture a diverse group of respondents.

- **Target Population**: Target Population will include learners those who have joined an Online degree program in NCR Region. Teachers teaching the Online degree programs from NCR will be selected. Learners and Teachers will be selected from the universities that have received permission from UGC to run online degree programs. These includes:
    - Amity University
    - Shiv Nadar University (Delhi NCR Campus)
    - Jamia Hamdard
    - Jamia Milia Islamia University
    - Jawaharlal Nehru University
    - O.P. Jindal Global University
    - Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak
    - GLA University
    - Galgotias University
    - Manavrachna International Institute of Research & Studies
    - Sharda University
    - Mangalayatan University

  Employers from the NCR Region will also be the target population.

- **Sample Size**: A minimum of 300 respondents from the learners, 200 from teachers, and 150 from employers will be targeted for the PLS-SEM analysis.

9.4 Data Analysis

PLS-SEM framework will be used for data analysis, which is well-suited for exploratory research and complex models with multiple constructs and indicators. The following steps will be followed:

1. **Measurement Model Assessment**: Measurement model will be assessed using indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations -HTMT).
2. **Structural Model Assessment**: Hypothesized relationships between the latent variables will be tested by examining path coefficients, t-values, and p-values. The significance of the relationships will be determined using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.
3. **Model Fit Evaluation**: (SRMR) and (NFI) will be used for assessing the Model Fit.

10. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this study are as follows:

1. Identification of Key Factors Influencing Learners' Willingness to Enroll in Online Degree Programs

The research will identify and quantify the key factors, such as ease of use, cost considerations, technological access, work-life balance, prior online learning experience, and perceived value of online degrees, that significantly impact learners' willingness to enroll in online degree programs. These insights will provide a better understanding of what motivates or deters students from choosing online education over traditional formats.

2. Understanding the Challenges Faced by Learners in Adopting Online Education

Challenges faced by the learners during the completion of online degree programs will be uncovered that would include technical issues, lack of self-motivation, limited interaction, resource constraints, and time management difficulties. This understanding will help educational institutions design more effective support systems and strategies to overcome these barriers, thereby improving student retention and success rates in online programs.

3. Identification of Challenges Faced by Teachers in Online Education

The research will highlight the main challenges teachers encounter when delivering online education, such as student engagement, technical difficulties, workload management, course design, and assessment challenges. These findings will inform the development of targeted training programs and institutional support mechanisms to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of online teaching.

4. Insights into Employers' Acceptance of Online Degrees

Factors that influence employers' acceptance of online degrees, including the reputation of the institution, perceived quality of the program, alignment with industry demands, and the skills and competencies gained by graduates will be explored. These insights will help educational institutions align their online programs with industry expectations and enhance the employability of their graduates.

5. Development of Recommendations for Stakeholders

The research will offer actionable recommendations for higher education institutions, policymakers, and educators to enhance the design, delivery, and acceptance of online degree programs. These recommendations could include strategies to improve the user experience, reduce barriers to adoption, and strengthen the credibility and market acceptance of online degrees.

6. Contribution to Academic Literature and Future Research

The research will contribute to the academic literature on online education by filling identified research gaps related to the factors influencing online education adoption, the specific challenges faced by different stakeholders, and the factors affecting employer acceptance of online degrees. The study’s findings may also serve as a foundation for future research in this area, particularly in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts.

7. Enhanced Policy and Institutional Frameworks

The research will provide evidence-based insights that can inform the development of more effective policies and institutional frameworks for online education. This includes recommendations for improving accessibility, affordability, and quality of online programs, as well as strategies for supporting both learners and educators in the transition to online education.

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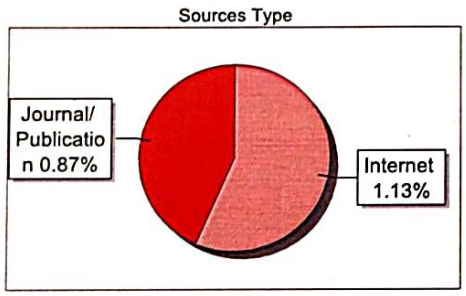

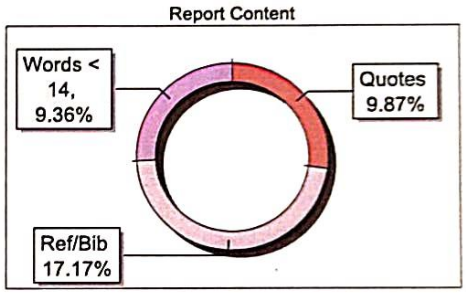

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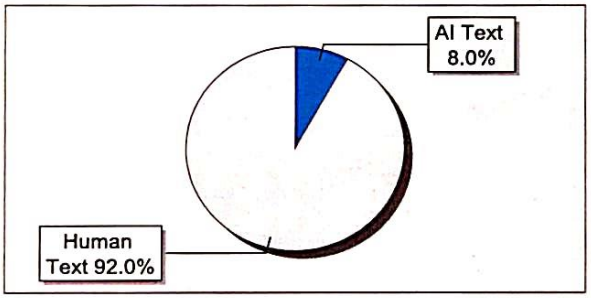

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